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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 COLOMBO 000221

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SUBJECT: NORWEGIAN AMBASSADOR'S VISIT TO "TENSE" KILINCHCHI

Classified By: Ambassador Robert O. Blake, Jr. for reasons
1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. Summary: In a February 5 readout of his February 1-2 visit to Kilinochchi, Norwegian Ambassador Brattskar described the mood in the area as very tense. LTTE spokesman and chief negotiator Tamilselvan complained to Brattskar that the Government of Sri Lanka (GSL) had gone to war by occupying Vakarai and breaking "every part" of the Cease-fire Agreement (CFA). Tamilselvan said that for peace talks to begin, the parties would have to go back to the Cease-fire Agreement which forms the basis for the peace process. Tamilselvan left what Brattskar termed "constructive uncertainty" about whether the LTTE would insist that the GSL give up the territory in Sampur, Vakarai and the rest of the east that it had gained in recent fighting. Brattskar reported that the local population was "fed up" with the increased forced recruitment by the LTTE, which had even affected local representatives of international NGOs. Co-Chair Ambassadors agreed it would be useful for Co-Chair capitals to have a conference call on or about February 12 to coordinate on common messages to the Government, including the need to finish the devolution plan by the end of February. End Summary.

Meeting with LTTE

¶2. (C) Brattskar indicated that he traveled to Kilinochchi on his own initiative simply to touch base with the LTTE. He spent 90 minutes with Tamilselvan. Tamilselvan complained that the GSL has gone to war by occupying Vakarai and breaking "every part" of the Cease-fire Agreement. He asserted the GSL was occupying land demarcated to the LTTE under the CFA. He implored the international community to tell the GSL to stop its "war-like" activities, but instead the international community continued to arm Sri Lanka. Tamilselvan piously asserted that the LTTE respects the CFA (which Brattskar flatly stated was untrue). Tamilselvan

noted that the LTTE still has the military capacity to mount offensives against the GSL such as those at Elephant Pass in the 1990's. However, he claimed the LTTE thus far has elected to abide by the CFA.

13. (C) Brattskar asked Tamilselvan how to restart the peace process. Tamilselvan responded that the parties have to go back to the Cease-fire Agreement which forms the basis for the peace process. Brattskar commented that Tamilselvan left what Brattskar termed "constructive uncertainty" about whether the LTTE would insist that the GSL give up the territory in Sampur, Vakarai and the rest of the east that it had gained in recent fighting.

14. (C) Brattskar briefed Tamilselvan on Co-Chair actions at the recent Development Forum and elsewhere to encourage a peaceful solution and maintain humanitarian access and respect for human rights. In particular he reassured Tamilselvan that most donors were urging the government to resettle rapidly all ethnic groups that had been displaced during the fighting in the east. Tamilselvan said many Tamils were afraid to go back since the army was building up its presence in the east, but he acknowledged that the GSL had not yet created any high security zones.

15. (C) With respect to the peace process Tamilselvan told Brattskar that the recent cabinet changes demonstrated that the politicians care only about making political deals. He asked rhetorically how the LTTE could trust and work with such people. He said the LTTE does not have high expectations about the all-party conference process to develop a devolution proposal, but he said he was aware that the international community attached great importance to the

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process and therefore the LTTE would await the final product.

Children in Armed Conflict

16. Brattskar briefed Tamilselvan on the upcoming consideration by a UN Security Council working group of Allan Rock's report. Tamilselvan highlighted the LTTE's child protection authority. He claimed that the GSL routinely recruited 17 year olds but did not send them into conflict until the age of 18 whereas the LTTE was being told it could not recruit anyone under the age of 18. Brattskar responded that all parties had to obey international law and not recruit child soldiers under the age of 18. Brattskar noted parenthetically that the local UNICEF representative in Kilinochchi had told him that the LTTE was cooperating more with UNICEF on child recruitment issues and appeared to be more careful about recruiting very young children. However, the recruitment of 16 and 17 year olds remained very high.

Atmospherics

17. (C) Brattskar commented that Vavuniya and Kilinochchi were very tense. Several of his interlocutors commented on the increased incidence of disappearances and killings. Many of the local population were also "fed up" with the increased forced recruitment by the LTTE. Local representatives of international NGOs also had been forcibly recruited by the LTTE. Telephone land lines to the area had been cut by the GSL for a week, apparently to prevent the LTTE from sending instructions to potential suicide bombers in Colombo in advance of Sri Lanka's National Day on February 4. The food situation was acceptable but there was a shortage of medicine. Brattskar noted that he had spoken to the Health Minister who claimed the medicine had been released by the GSL but was sitting at checkpoints because local authorities had not yet received central government approval to let medicine through. Ambassador agreed to raise this problem at the next coordination meeting with the Disaster Management Minister and the Defense Secretary.

Co-Chairs Recommend Conference Call with Capitals

18. (C) Co-Chair Ambassadors agreed it would be useful for Co-Chair capitals to have a conference call on February 12 (or any other date in the near future) to coordinate common messages to the Government. The Ambassadors agreed it would be important for all countries to support Indian PM Singh's recent message to Foreign Minister Bogollogama that the GSL should have a devolution proposal ready by the end of February, since the date for its completion continued to slip. Ambassadors also agreed that it would be important for capitals to discuss how to respond to the changed circumstances in the east. EU Head of Mission Wilson noted, for example, that the EU had allocated development assistance to go through the Northeast Provincial Council. The GSL was now telling the EU that this Council was no longer functioning and that the aid should therefore be divided and sent to new separate provincial councils in the north and east. The EU was now deliberating what to do. Accepting the GSL recommendation would mean a tacit acquiescence to the de-merger of the north and east, which should really be the subject of peace negotiations between the LTTE and the GSL. Septel will provide more info on this important point.
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